

**INTERIOR DESIGN OF THE BABA-NYONYA
ECLECTIC SHOPHOUSES IN MELAKA**

By

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REKABENTUK DALAMAN RUMAH KEDAI EKLEKTIK BABA-NYONYA

DI MELAKA

ABSTRAK

China Selat, juga dikenali sebagai Baba-Nyonya atau Cina Peranakan, pada dasarnya terhasil daripada gabungan dua budaya, iaitu Melayu dan Cina. Budaya Baba-Nyonya mempunyai tanda-tanda budaya rakyat Kepulauan Melayu (Jawa, Batak), budaya Thai dan Eropah (Belanda, Portugis dan British) namun kebanyakannya berkisar kepada budaya Melayu dan Cina. Pada masa kini, rumah kedai eklektik yang menonjol dengan tahap pencapaian seni bina yang begitu unik telah menghadapi kesukaran untuk mencapai kesinambungan akibat daripada kekurangan kemahiran dan pengetahuan mengenai pemuliharaannya. Oleh itu, tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk meneroka keunikan budaya Baba-Nyonya yang boleh dibentangkan melalui kajian seni bina dan reka bentuk dalaman. Sasaran empat buah rumah kedai yang menjadi keutamaan kajian ini adalah rumah-rumah kedai yang boleh terdapat di Jalan Tun Tan Cheng Lock, Melaka. Kajian ini mengkaji pelbagai cara untuk menganalisis dan mengkaji seni bina dan ciri-ciri rekabentuk dalaman rumah kedai Baba-Nyonya. Ia menggunakan kaedah kualitatif termasuk mendokumentasikan bukti, temu bual dan pengumpulan data visual sepenuhnya yang mengandungi nilai warisan budaya di Malaysia. Kajian ini juga mementingkan falsafah, adat dan ritual yang berkaitan dengan seni bina. Hasil kajian ini mendedahkan bahawa kawasan pedalaman mencerminkan semangat keluarga Baba Nyonya dan gaya hidup masyarakat Baba. Ruang dalaman mereka juga mencerminkan gaya hidup keluarga dan komuniti Baba. Peruntukan dan perhiasan ruang dalam bangunan warisan ini direka dalam cara untuk mempamerkan imej rohani dan budaya masyarakat Baba Nyonya. Sejak Melaka disenaraikan di dalam

senarai warisan dunia UNESCO, ia adalah penting bagi memajukan senibina Baba-Nyonya untuk memastikan kewujudan pemuliharaan budaya secara berterusan.

INTERIOR DESIGN OF THE BABA-NYONYA ECLECTIC SHOPHOUSES IN MELAKA

ABSTRACT

The Straits Chinese, fondly known as the Baba-Nyonya or China Peranakan. The Baba-Nyonya culture features a hint of the people's cultures of the Malay (Javanese, Batak), Thai and European (Dutch, Portuguese and British) cultures but mainly revolves around Malay and Chinese cultures. Nonetheless, the supreme architectural achievement of this minority group- their eclectic shophouses is now facing a crisis which may determine its survival. The problem is critical for there is inconsistently lack of sound knowledge in conservation of their shophouses. It is, therefore, the aim of this research to explore the uniqueness of the Baba-Nyonya cultures which are can be unfolded through inspecting their architecture and interior design. The targeted four shophouses of interest of this research are those that can be found on Jalan Tun Tan Cheng Lock, Melaka. This research analyzes the architectural aspects and focuses on the interior design features of the Baba-Nyonya shophouses. The methodology adopted herein is qualitative in which documenting evidence, direct observation, twenty interviews and visual data are utilized to fully conceive the value of this cultural heritage in Malaysia. The results are then related to their cultural philosophies, customs and rituals. The findings of this research revealed that the culture of Chinese, Malay and European have strong influences on the furniture and, interior space and details of Baba-Nyonya eclectic shophouses. The result also displayed that the allocation and embellishment of wood carving, building facade and furniture within these old buildings are designed in a way to exhibit their spiritual images. The significance of these shophouses comes from its seamless connections with every daily lifestyle in any Baba-Nyonya enclave. Since

Melaka has been listed under the UNESCO world heritage list, it is essential to study the Baba-Nyonya architecture to ensure a continuous conservation of its cultural existence.

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the background of the culture of the Baba-Nyonyas, terminology of Baba-Nyonya, problem statements, objectives, focus and scope of research.

1.2 Research Background

Chinese migration to the Malay Peninsula began six centuries ago, from the time of the Melaka Sultanate around 1400, and continuing until the formation of an independent Malayan state in 1957. Common geographic and linguistic origins in China have shaped the geographic, economic and social patterns of Chinese immigration in their new settlements. Only in the 1930's-50s, these Chinese communities of different linguistic origins eventually integrated for their common interests, participating actively in the political, economic and social institutions of Malay Peninsula.

Baba-Nyonya are the result of intermarriages between Chinese and local Malay women. There are no artefacts that recorded when the acculturated Chinese first identified themselves as Baba-Nyonyas (Figure 1.1). The large number of Chinese immigrants in the nineteenth century gave rise to a consciousness in distinguishing between the early Chinese settlers and the new immigrants. These late comers were generally known as *sinkheh* or new guests to make their distinction from the Baba Nyonya communities. Generations of Baba-Nyonya are found throughout the Straits Settlement - Melaka and Penang, Peninsular Malaysia.



Figure 1.1 Portrait of Baba and Nyonya

There are arguments in defining Baba-Nyonya and its origin. To avoid confusions, the researcher explored the cultural elements of Baba-Nyonya and prepared additional appropriate definitions to the term Baba-Nyonya. They included the term Peranakan, Straits Chinese and Straits Born Chinese. These terms have been used interchangeably by the people themselves and by people describing them (Khoo, 1998; Emmanuel, 2008).

The Baba-Nyonya spoke Baba Malay, dialect of the Malay language that contains Hokkien words. They retained most of their ethnic and religious origins but assimilated into the culture of Malays. They tended to dress in Malay costumes, but their customs are heavily influenced by the Chinese in certain aspects, especially in marriage (Figure 1.2), festival celebrations and ancestral beliefs. The Baba-Nyonya food displays an intermixture of various cultures, where it combines Malay and

Chinese cuisine with influences from Indonesia, Thailand, India, Holland, Portugal and England (refer Chapter 2).



Figure 1.2 Baba-Nyonya wedding costume

The Chinese race is one of the major races after the Malays and followed by the Indians and other indigenous people in Malaysia. The Baba-Nyonya is categorized as a minority among the groups. Surveys of literature in the Baba-Nyonya culture claimed that the culture had undergone substantial acculturation and formed a distinct socio-cultural group among the ethnic Chinese (Png, 1969; Lee and Tan, 2000). The Baba culture emerged in Melaka before the arrival of the British and the society thrived under British rule in the nineteenth century.

This research explores the cultural heritage of the Baba-Nyonya in Melaka: the place of its origins. Today, the trace of Baba-Nyonya architecture is still prevalent in the Melaka town, and delightfully, the Baba-Nyonya community continues to practice part of the main traditions in religions ritual and festivals. The

historic city of the Straits of Melaka was added to UNESCO's world heritage list in 2008. The honour of this award has caught enormous attention towards the preservation and conservation of Baba-Nyonya architecture heritage and catapulted the city of Melaka to an even more important position in the success of this campaign.

The research site is located on Jalan Tun Tan Cheng Lock in Melaka. It is chosen for this research since it first evolved as a gallery of Straits Chinese material aspiration from the early 19th century to World War Two (refer Chapter 4). The literatures on Baba-Nyonya cultural elements are emphasized as they contributed essential influences in the architecture design and interior arrangements of the Baba-Nyonya shophouses. Elements are the main focus in this research because they are interrelated closely to present a completeness of the Baba Nyonya shophouses. Therefore equivalent efforts had been devoted to study these two subjects.

1.3 Historical Background

The China Peranakan or Straits Chinese, also fondly known as the Baba-Nyonya, was a prominent community of acculturated Chinese in the Straits Settlements (Penang, Melaka and Singapore). The Baba-Nyonya culture also exhibits an integration of the Malay Archipelago (Javanese, Batak), Thai and European (Dutch, Portuguese and British) cultures. Their origins dated back to approximately 600 years ago when the first Chinese traders settled in Melaka awaiting the prevailing winds required for sailing home. Most of them were Hokkiens from the Fujian province that set off from ports such as Amoy (now Xiamen). Others were from Guangdong province. They had business links between southern China, Malaysia and Indonesia.

Chinese women were not allowed to leave their country by law until the middle of the 19th century; hence almost all traders from China were males. Inter ethnic marriages with local folk were practices; whom then became the guardians of business during the absence of the china men (Moore, 1986).

In the 18th and 19th centuries Babas were the merchants of opium, *sireh* (betel leaf), nutmeg and liquor farming, pepper and gambier cultivation, tin mining, commodity trading and property. In the early 20th century, they switched their investments to rubber estates in Peninsular Malaysia. They played as the middlemen for big Western companies and banks because most of the educated Baba could speak fluent English. Good relationship with colonial government led the Baba community to affirm themselves as already rooted in Malaya, and hence they became active participants in civic projects or served in the local government. Some of them even evolved as the pioneers to acquire national independence for Malaysia and Singapore. Many Nyonyas also played the key roles in female emancipation (Khoo, 1998).

Nowadays, this minority Chinese community faces the same dilemmas and problems, such as the decline of traditions, the inability to speak the dialect and the growing number of mixed marriages. All these factors lead to great changes in the culture and uncertainty about the future. However the increasing numbers of Baba cultural activities as well as growth in memberships of Baba organisations indicate an improved awareness toward the Baba heritage. Thus, both public and private sectors have begun to devote more efforts in preservation and conservation of Baba Nyonya legacies.

1.4 Terminology of Baba- Nyonya

When studying the ethnic identity of Baba-Nyonya, several different terms such as Baba-Nyonya, Peranakan, Straits Chinese and Straits Born Chinese are used to address the same group. The study of community identity is essential in positing a better understanding about the group under investigation, whom the interviewees are Baba-Nyonya, before further exploring their perception towards the subjects of study.

1.4.1 Origin of Baba-Nyonya ,Peranakan, Straits Chinese, Straits Born Chinese, Baba and Nyonya

Babas, among the minority race in Malaysia, stand out as the most unique ethnic group. This unique culture was found in Melaka before the arrival of the British. There are a few possibilities that may explain the origins of Baba-Nyonyas. Purcell (1967) stated in his examination of Chinese settlements in Melaka, that there are three important periods in the history of Melaka and Singapore. He lists them as follows: (1) the Melaka Sultanate up to 1511 (2) the Portuguese's ruling up to 1641 and (3) the Dutch and British's ruling up to the end of British colonisation and prestige in 1941 with the fall of the fortress of Singapore to the Japanese.

Purcell (1967) stated that during the ruling of the Melaka Sultan, a Chinese community already resided in Melaka although there was no record of how big and permanent this Chinese community was. The Chinese of that time mostly were Hokkiens from Fujian province or from Guandong province. These seafarers and traders were staying in Melaka to wait for the changing winds that could take them back to China. Another possibility is that the Babas were the descendants of the five hundred attendants who accompanied Princess Hang Li Po of China to Melaka. The Princess was given in marriage to Sultan Mansur Shah (1459-1477). She was then

given a hill named Bukit China (China Hill) by the Sultan. This hill now has the largest Chinese cemetery beyond the frontier of China. Other than that, there are maps showing a section of the Melaka Town as Kampong China (China Village) during the Portuguese's ruling, but the records were not clear about the size and permanency of the Chinese people during their ruling. In 1641, the Dutch welcomed more Chinese to reconstruct Melaka after they took over Melaka. The Dutch also brought in other races such as the Balinese, Javanese, Ambonese, Sundanese, Bataks and others from various parts of Sumatra.

The exact date when the acculturated Chinese first identified themselves as 'Baba' or 'Peranakan' is unknown, but in the nineteenth century there was a clear distinction between the early Chinese settlers and the new immigrants from China, whom they called *sinkheks* (new arrivals). *Sinkheks* were politically oriented towards China while the Babas were oriented towards Malaya and loyal to the British government. According to Lee (2008), the word Peranakan is derived from Malay 'anak' which means 'child'. The term refers to the local born and the descendants of foreigner-native union.

The term "straits Chinese", "straits-born Chinese", and "Baba" have often been used to refer to the same group - the Chinese of the Straits Settlements which consist of Singapore, Melaka and Penang. Kwok (1994) stated that the term "straits Chinese", "straits-born Chinese", and "Baba" were used interchangeably and applied generically to the local-born Chinese, regardless of their dialect background. However, some believe that these words have different meanings. According to Tan (1998, cited by Teo 2003), he stated that the term "Baba" is a term with middle Eastern (probably Turkish) origin meaning "father", "grandfather", or "venerable man". Tan (1988) claimed "Baba" was introduced to the South-east Asia through

India. The term was meant for the indigenous people of the region. Vaughan (1971) also stated that the term Baba is used by the natives of Bengal to designate the children of Europeans and it is probable that the word was applied by the Indian convicts at Penang to Chinese children and that was why it came into use. The word “Baba” was collected in Douglas’s Hokkien dictionary with the meaning a half-caste Chinese from the Straits.

Referring to P’ng (1969), R.J. Wilkinson (1959) gave the following two meanings: “descriptive name applied to colonial-born European, Eurasian and Chinese males to distinguish them from men born in Europe and China”, and “descriptive name applied to male Straits-born Chinese.” On the other hand, Tan (1988) stated that Frank Swettenham explained the term “Baba” was used for Straits-born males, whether children of English, Chinese or Eurasian parents, and was of Hindustani origin. Chia (1994) declared that a “Baba” can be said to be one whose first ancestor married, or made a union with, a local woman of the pre-Islamic era.

From these definitions, the view of Chia is in common with the definition of Melaka Baba - the Baba combines Chinese and Malay culture, a throwback to early Chinese settlers marrying local Malay women. To preserve and propagate the Baba-Nyonya community, intermarriage between the Babas and the Malays eventually ceased. The Baba-Nyonyas were given marriage within their own community that is Babas marry Nyonyas, and usually from generation to generation.

Babas refer to the male descendants and the Nyonyas the females. According to Lee (2008), he claimed that the word Nyonya is said to have originated from Java. The word Nyonya (also commonly misspelled nonya) is a Javanese loan honorific word from Dutch Nona (grandma) meaning: foreign married Madam. Because

Javanese at the time had a tendency to address all foreign women (and perhaps those who appeared foreign) as nyonya, they used that term for Straits-Chinese women, too, and it was gradually associated more exclusively with them. However, based on the definition from Peranakan Association Singapore, Lee (2009) claimed that the term nona, or nonha, is known throughout the lands of the old Portuguese world and even in Mozambique (Portuguese Africa) and in Macau, where it was a term for a Eurasian, or a young native girl married to a European. It may be connected to the Portuguese 'Dona' or in Spanish "Doña" (pronounced "donya"), meaning "Lady".

Due to the social custom, behaviour, language and identity, there is a distinction made between Straits Chinese, Straits-born Chinese and Baba. Straits-born Chinese referred to the first generation local born Chinese who still adhered to Chinese culture, speak Chinese, celebrated Chinese festival and acted like his immigrant Chinese parents. Straits Chinese were defined as those born or living in the Straits Settlements and who maintained a basically Chinese identity, they gradually abandon close link of kinship, sentiment, political allegiance and financial remittances to China. This behavior is clearly contradicted with the characteristic of the non-Baba Chinese (Clammer 1980 cited in Lee 2008)

According to Rosie Tan (1958) cited by P'ng (1969) about the qualifications of a Baba are as follows:

- a) One who identified himself as a Baba
- b) At least one if not more female members of his family habitually wore somewhat Malay-styled dress
- c) Either he or at least some members of his family, if not all, spoke the Straits Chinese patois- Baba Malay

d) His family had a strong preference for Malay and/ or Straits Chinese food.

By the statement above, we can conclude that those who were born in the Straits Settlements did not qualify as Babas. Therefore all Babas would be Straits Chinese, but all the Straits Chinese were not necessarily be Babas. In the same way, all Straits Chinese would be Straits born, but not all Straits born were Straits Chinese. Thus Straits-born Chinese comprises all Chinese who born in the Straits Settlements be independent of their cultural and social background, while Straits Chinese are identified by their cultural and social considerations. This can be concluded clearly in figure 1.3.

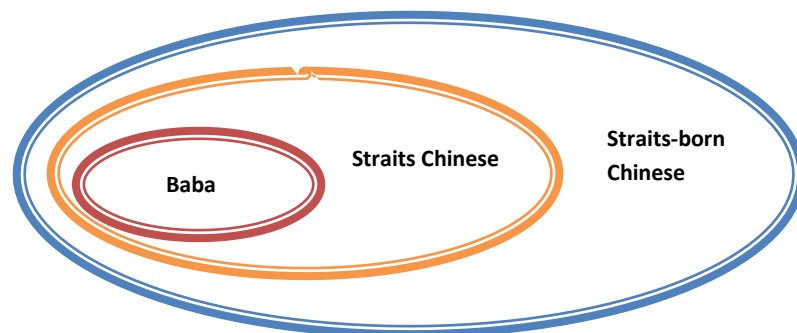


Figure 1.3 Baba as a sub-group for Straits Chinese and Straits born Chinese.

The wearing of the sarong and kebaya, incorporation of local herbs and spices in their cuisine and adoption of local Malay dialects into their daily language reveal that the culture of Baba-Nyonya is assimilated into Malay culture. They retained some practices of Chinese cultures especially in marriage, festival celebrations and ancestral worship but at the same time emulated into the local culture and lifestyle in

order to minimize the culture shock. There are three centres of Baba communities - Melaka, Penang and Singapore. The Babas in Singapore were originally migrants from Melaka and they have similar culture. According to Chia (1994), Melaka Babas were influenced by motherhood (Malays), while Penang Babas were influenced by fatherhood (Chinese). The language spoken and the literary orientations influenced by this dominance. The Melaka Babas speak in a Malay accent interspersed with Chinese words, whereas the Penang Babas speak Hokkien juxtaposed with Malay words.

1.5 Problem Statements

Today, the continuation of Baba culture faces crisis considering the decline of traditions, the growing number of mixed marriages and its gradually forgotten dialect. Furthermore, many of its customs and rituals are less practiced. For example, nowadays marriage ceremonies are conducted in a single day, unlike the previous marriage ceremonies which lasted 12 days in the traditional Baba-Nyonya culture. Most of the younger Babas, engrossed in the pursuit of material success, show less interest in the Peranakan culture. They are not familiar with the Baba Malay and are unaware of their heritage. In addition, the influx of immigration of Chinese into Malaya in the 19th century also contributed to the disintegration of the Baba culture. Since the 1940s, many Babas have slowly indulged themselves into non-Baba Chinese communities. An important factor which caused this is the marriage between Baba and non-Baba Chinese. (Lee and Tan, 2000)

Being influenced by local mainstream culture, the Baba traditions have diminished rapidly in modern days as a result of cultural assimilation. In many

circumstances, the identity of the Baba descendants has been looked upon as a predominant Hokkien-speaking Chinese community. Social and political factors in Malaysia have also contributed to its deterioration (Salleh, 1998). Government policies in Malaysia classify Baba-Nyonyas as ethnically Chinese. They study Mandarin Chinese as their mother tongue in schools which has resulted in a sharp decline of the speakers of Baba Malay or Malay Patois, their traditional mother tongue, in most Baba families. The Baba language or Baba Malay is a patois of the Malay language, with many words borrowed from Chinese (especially Hokkien), Portuguese, Dutch, Tamil and English.(Lee, 2008) Furthermore, the standardization of Malay as Bahasa Melayu has led to the disappearance of the unique characteristics of Baba Malay.

The Baba-Nyonya culture is a wonderful hybrid of cultures that gave birth to splendid architecture, traditional and aesthetic information. The hybrid of the Baba culture are mostly extracted and refined from Chinese, Malay, Javanese, Batak, Thai and European elements, forming new remarkable decorative embellishments which are named as the Straits Eclectic style. It is very difficult for one to fully comprehend as well as digest these sophisticated fusions in Baba culture, let alone to take appropriate actions for its restoration. Poor understandings toward the use pattern of interior space in Baba-Nyonya shophouses are the result from superficial observations on their cultural behaviour. Very few written records or documentation on the embellishment and detailing in terms of architecture and interior space have been produced so far.

In addition, it is very hard to identify the origin of the cultural influences on Baba-Nyonya shophouses. New generations of the Baba-Nyonya have largely abandoned these traditional lifestyle and culture practices. Without any

documentation as reference, it is difficult to trace its roots. With the passing away of the old master-craftsmen and reluctance of the younger generations to persist in traditional craftsmanship, any preservation and restoration works becomes arduous. The knowledge about the Baba-Nyonya shophouses in terms of architecture and interior design, if becomes unknown, will then cease to exist in human history.

Most of the Baba-Nyonya populate in two well known cities of Malaysia. The historic city of the Straits of Melaka and Penang were added to the UNESCO's world heritage list on 2008. The town constitutes a unique architectural and cultural townscape in East and Southeast Asia. However, most historical structures including the Baba-Nyonya shophouses have shown dramatic changes to fit modern lifestyle. Due to the change in the use of space and new owner's preference renovation, some of the buildings have been immensely modified. There is no effective legal protection to date that can preserve and conserve the heritage building that leads to destructive renovations or demolition (Lim and Jorge, 2006). Rules and regulations in preserving and conserving the Baba-Nyonya shophouses currently are not standardised in this country. The deterioration of the Baba culture has caused the fading of its identity and this can lead to the loss of place in World Heritage City list. Therefore, the shophouses must be restored through using appropriate methods regarding design, materials, methodologies, techniques and workmanship, in accordance with new conservation guidelines and principles that are yet to come.

1.6 Objectives

The main objectives of this study are:

- a) To analyse the interior design features of the Baba-Nyonya shophouses.
- b) To examine the embellishment and detailing of the Baba-Nyonya shophouses in terms of architecture and interior space.

1.7 Focus and Scope of Research

This research involves an observation on the culture of Baba-Nyonya Melaka, with special reference to their architecture and interior design. The researcher investigates the interrelationship between culture and interior architecture that directly reflects the Baba-Nyonya tradition and practices in their physical activities and creations. In fact, Baba-Nyonya shophouses are built to fulfil both realistic needs and cultural values of the Baba-Nyonya who originate from China, by transforming the alien land to a more familiar, comfortable environment as their new homes.

1.7.1 Architecture & Interior and Baba-Nyonya culture

Architecture and interior design are form of the cultural expressions. Architecture and interior are part of a culture. Though buildings are constructed of durable materials, they also provide invaluable, long-lasting information about the past. Through architecture researchers can gauge information about Baba-Nyonya lifestyle, social structures and more importantly, their incomparable, unique artistic sensibilities that can only be bred under a great fusion of Eastern and Western cultures. The creation of architecture and interior designs are to suit owners' needs, where the space created will honestly informs us of almost-everything about the users.

An investigation was conducted to understand the relationship between shophouses and the Baba-Nyonya culture. Expression of perceptions, changing values and ways of life can be illusively noticed through intricate pieces of building decorations and layouts. Its uniqueness arises from the blend of multiple cultural elements, especially the combination of Malay and Chinese culture which have displayed well-developed-acculturation process in the Malay Peninsula. It is an appropriate activity by surveying the Baba-Nyonya shophouses to examine the products of cross culture.

1.7.2 Scope of Research

Following tasks will be undertaken as a part of the research:

1. Origins of Baba-Nyonya culture and whereabouts of the cultural influences on to Baba-Nyonya shophouses.

This study discusses both culture and macro concept under the ethnographic. The Baba-Nyonya culture is studied as support to macro concept, by acquainting the exact meanings or values that have brought up the design rationale for details of Baba-Nyonya architecture and interior. Cultural understanding is preferred since architecture and interior are interrelated to culture life. This approach is important to clarify origins of Baba-Nyonya culture and whereabouts of the cultural influences onto shophouses.

2. To identify the characteristic of Baba-Nyonya shophouses in term of Architecture and interior design.

Baba-Nyonya shophouses are observed to identify the function, characteristics and space planning. The relationship between exterior and interior can

be identified clearly and provides a whole picture on Baba-Nyonya lifestyle. It is important to comprehend social interaction in Baba-Nyonya shophouses to unveil social relations that have been established.

3. To evaluate the differences of past Baba-Nyonya houses and present Baba-Nyonya shophouses in Melaka.

Special attention is paid to traditional Baba-Nyonya houses and present Baba-Nyonya shophouses to analyze the evolution of building from residential purpose to multipurpose use. The details of shophouses in terms of embellishment, furniture, ornamentation on interior elements are constantly observed when field work is conducted. It is crucial to evaluate traditional and new elements or material applied in the shophouses.

1.8 Summary of the Chapters

The main contents in this chapter cover the introduction of Baba-Nyonya, historical background and research background. The objectives have proclaimed the issues that can be explored and studied in details - with the intention to gain a closer inception of this architectural heritage regarding its interior design, in the hope that this refined document will aid to improve the quality of future preservation and conservation works.

To have a better comprehension of the Baba-Nyonya culture and its architectural style and materials have been studied and summarised in the literature review of Chapter 2. In Chapter 3, it shows the various methods that have been employed to scrutinise the culture of Baba-Nyonya, their people and also buildings.

In general, the methodology of documenting evidence, interviews and visual data collection had been adopted in order to fully conceive the value of this cultural heritage in Malaysia.

The finding parts in Chapter 4 cover about the importance of the historical elements to the details of Baba interior architecture, which have been the main ingredients to shape the inherent cultural achievements imbued within Baba-Nyonya shophouses. Exterior decoration and layout arrangements of shophouses that serve commercial and residential purposes have been analysed in Chapter 5 to reflect the connection between the applied physical design and the lifestyle of Baba families. Lastly, in Chapter 6, conclusions have been drawn for this paper to briefly summarise the researcher's findings and her suggestions to the direction of future research.

CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses on previous research being conducted. In chapter 2, materials from Lee (2008), Lim (2003) and Cheo (1983), have been studied and summarised to have better understanding of the Baba-Nyonya culture .Previous researches from Chen (2005), Kohl (1984), Ho (2008), Ahmad (1994) , Kamal (2008) and (M. Rasdi, 1997) provide information on architecture style of Baba-Nyonya shophouses ,interior space of Baba-Nyonya shophouses and its furniture.

2.2 Baba-Nyonya Culture

This research delves to investigate Baba-Nyonya culture, including its religion, language, costume, food and marriage where all are tightly related to the architecture and interior of Baba-Nyonya shophouses.

2.2.1 Religion

Baba-Nyonya maintained their forefather's belief in Chinese religion, yet they have also adopted the Malay beliefs of *keramat* (a “thaumaturgic gift” akin to the miracles of prophets) and guardian spirits of sacred sites. They primarily practice Taoism, Confucianism, Chinese Buddhism and ancestor worshipping. They celebrated all major traditional Chinese festivals, such as the Lunar New Year , the Lantern Festival and the Dragon Boat Festival (Lim, 2003).

2.2.2 Language

Referring to Lee (2008) and Cheo (1983), the Baba language or Baba Malay is a patois of the Malay language, with many words borrowed from Chinese (especially Hokkien), Portuguese, Dutch, Tamil and English. It is a Creole language for intra-group communication and was the lingua franca of the Straits Settlements. The Baba Malay language is dying fast today and many of the young cannot speak it, having been brought up to concentrate on English, Malay and even Mandarin.

2.2.3 Costume

Baba-Nyonya costumes are different between men and women. Basically, the costume is influenced by Chinese, Malay and European culture.

2.2.3.1 Costume for Women

The Nyonya's clothing was identical to that of the native Malay. *Baju panjang* (long dress), a *batik sarung* (batik wrap-around skirt) and three *kerongsang* (brooch) are worn by the elderly Nyonya. Accessories such as hairpins and bracelets are worn beside plain long dress. Elderly Nyonya preferred conservative colours and simple designs while young Nyonya preferred patterned and brighter attires. A square batik or Chinese silk handkerchief is tucked into the right or left shoulder of the attire for formal occasions. According to Lim (2003), by the late 1910s and 1920s, the Nyonyas started wearing the kebaya which is a fashion that started in the Dutch West Indies. It is embroidered and is worn with batik sarongs with floral designs.

Beaded slippers called *Kasut Manek* were hand-made products made with much skill and patience: strung, beaded and sewn onto canvas with tiny faceted glass beads from Bohemia (present-day Czech Republic). In modern times, glass beads

from Japan are preferred. Traditional *Kasut Manek* design often has European floral subjects, with colours influenced by Peranakan porcelain and batik sarongs. They were made onto flats or bedroom slippers. But from the 1930s, modern shapes became popular and heels were added (Wikipedia, 2009). Nyonyas would dress up in cheongsam and samfoos, Chinese fashion occasionally. From 1930s onwards, nyonya attire tended to divert to western style. It is portrayed as a status symbol and worn during associating with British.

2.2.3.2 Costume for Men

For Baba, they are wearing the baju *lok chuan* , chinese-style jacket and loose trousers. Later, the Baba costume converted to a *baju tutup* (men's suit with a high-collared jacket). Same as Nyonya, the Babas wore western attire most of the time from 1930s onwards.

2.2.4 Food

Peranakan food is a combination of Malay and Chinese cuisines with influences from Indonesia, Thailand, India, Holland, Portugal and England. The unique cuisine was developed using ingredients such as *lengkuas* (galangal), *serai* (lemon grass), chillis, *kunyit* (turmeric), *halia* (ginger), *tau cheow* (bean paste) , tamarind, lime juice, *belachan* (shrimp paste) , *buah keras* (candlenuts), *gula Melaka* (palm sugar), spices such as star anise, cinnamon, cardamom, cloves, nutmeg, leaves such as *daun kesum* (sweet basil leaves), *daun limau purut* (Kaffir lime leaves), pandan leaves, from which the Nyonyas concocted a unique cuisine, with predominantly spicy and piquant flavours (Lee, 2008).

A Nyonya's cooking ability could be assessed in the old days from the rhythm of the way she pounded the spices to make *sambal belachan* (shrimp paste). Delicate cakes, pastries and sweets were laboriously prepared as skill in cooking these delicacies was considered a great asset in the marriage stakes. Peranakan eat the way Malays do, with their fingers. Chopsticks are however used during elaborate festive celebrations and festivals. Some well-known Peranakan dishes are: *Otak Otak* (a cake made of fish meat and spices), *Ayam Pongteh* (Nyonya Soy braised chicken), *Assam Laksa* (noodle in tangy first soup), *Achar* (type of salad) (Figure 2.1), *Bakwan Kepiting* (crab and pork balls cooked with bamboo shoots in a fragrant prawn stock) (Figure 2.2), *Cincalok* (fermented small shrimps) Omelette and Pork Liver Balls.



Figure 2.1 *Achar*
(Source: Lim, 2003)



Figure 2.2 *Bakwan Kepiting*
(Source: Lim, 2003)

2.2.5 Marriage

From the 19th and the early 20th centuries show that Baba usually took their brides from within the local Baba-Nyonya community. Marriages within the community and of similar stature were the norm. Wealthy men preferred to marry a *chin choay*: or matrilocal marriage where husband moved in with the wife's family.

Proposals of marriage were made by a gift of a proposal, a 2-tiered lacquered basket, to the intended bride's parents brought by a go-between who speaks on behalf of the suitor (Wikipedia, 2009). The traditional wedding ceremony ran for twelve days but it is hardly celebrated this long nowadays. The Chinese style gowns were elaborately embroidered and crowned with a headdress of gold and diamonds. At weddings, the *Dondang Sayang*, a form of extempore rhyming song in Malay, is sung and danced by guests at the wedding party. By studying the culture of Baba-Nyonya, the design rationale of interior space in Baba-Nyonya shophouses can be understood in ease as most of the design decisions are a reflection to the lifestyle of Baba community.

2.3 Architecture Style of Baba-Nyonya

This part will discuss the conventional forms and features of Baba-Nyonya shophouses (Figure 2.3).

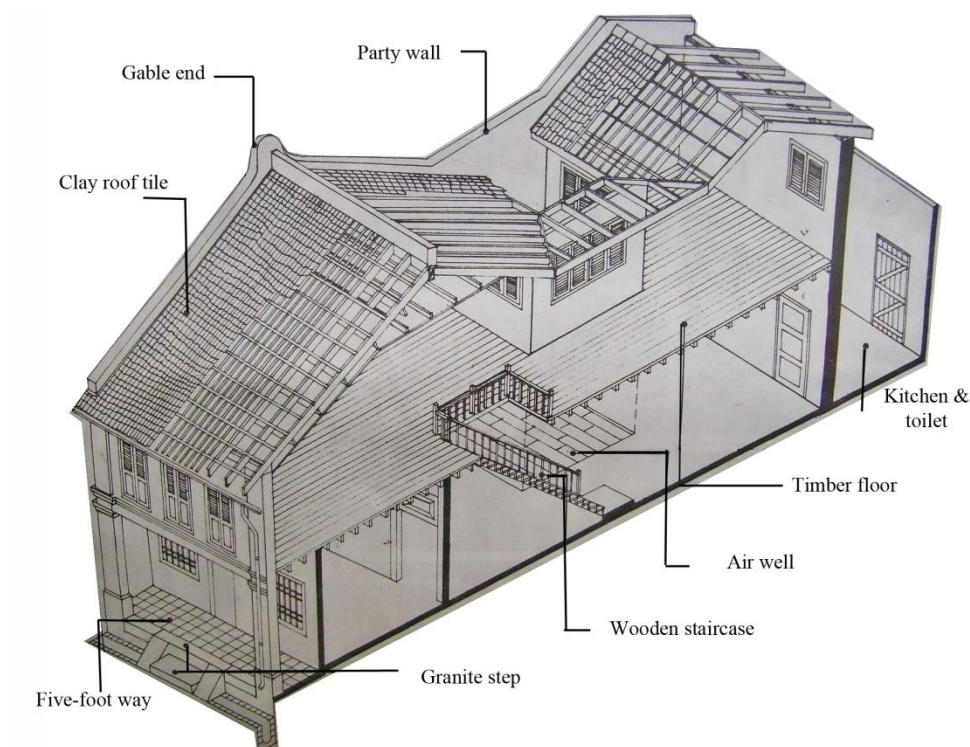


Figure 2.3 Features of shophouses

2.3.1 Features of Early Shophouses

The shophouse is a building with two or more storeys which serves both the commercial and residential purposes. The tenants of the shophouses run businesses at the front section of the ground floor, while their living areas were located at the rear of the house and the upper floors. According to Chen (2005) and Kohl (1984), the origin of the shophouses can be traced back to the Chinese immigrants from the densely populated southern coastal provinces of China in the 19th century. They utilized and modified their knowledge and methods of construction into the Malaysia urban shophouses to adapt to the local climate.

The early shophouses were narrowed in width and long in depth, usually around 6-7 metres wide and 30 metres deep, sometimes extending to 60 metres. The narrow façade, which is usually less than 10 metres in width, is due to the taxation rules imposed by the Dutch on the number of windows per façade. Shophouses were built side by side with common party wall. The walls were built of bricks and were plastered.

One of the typical interior features – air-well located inside the centre of shophouses. The air-well functions as an internal courtyard which is typical of residences all over China. Long internal spaces with no openings on the side of the shophouses require the use of several air-wells. It enhances ventilation of the shophouses and lights up the rear section to ensure a good flow of life force or ‘*chi* energy’.

Adjacent to the entrance are square windows, and above the windows is the ventilation opening. This entire ventilation opening is carved out of wood with a pierced decoration or painted in auspicious colours or even partially gilded. They are

carved with motifs carrying symbolic meanings. For example, the peony is a symbol of wealth and renewal while the bat carving brings good luck and happiness.

Every shophouse has a verandah or “*kaki lima*” with a minimum width of five feet. Chen (2005) stated that Sir Stamford Raffles, the British colonial administrator of Singapore in 1822 first regulated that all shophouses had to include a minimum five-foot wide verandah on the ground floor. Tropical weather conditions with its heavy rains and hot sun led to the appearance of the five foot way. It provides a shading area for pedestrian and a place to display goods, improvise workshops and even a place for resting on a rattan chair.

De Bierre (2006) states that shophouse façade are a main attraction because they comprise of tiling catered from all periods – Victorian, Edwardian, Art Nouveau, Art Deco, 1950’s mosaic and even 60’s pop art. The function of tiling is to protect walls from water splashing off road. The China Peranakan transforms it into an art form by mixing colours and patterns to bring out a style for the doorstep. Most of the tiles were imported from Britain with English Rose as motif.

2.3.2 Architectural Style of Shophouse

There are four architectural styles of shop houses in Malaysia: early shophouse (18th century) traditional shophouse (19th century), Straits Eclectic shophouse (1900-1940) and Art Deco shophouse (1940-1960’s) (Ahmad, 1994; Kamal, 2008). The Baba-Nyonya shophouses belong to the style of Straits Eclectic.

2.3.3 Architectural style of the Baba-Nyonya Shophouse

Shophouses in the Straits Settlements emphasize the design on full-length French windows with a pair of full-length timber shutters, an arched or rectangular transom over window openings, pilasters of classical orders and plaster renderings (Ahmad, 1994). From 1910's the use of reinforced concrete allowed wider roof overhangs and more elaborated cantilevered concrete decorations. The shophouse has two or three moulded openings. Plaster renderings such as bouquets of flowers, fruits, mythical figures and geometrical shapes were used to decorate the pilasters placed between openings, the spaces above the arched transom and below the openings. Baba- Nyonya shophouses have highly intricate ornaments and carvings to show off their wealth and status in the local community.

Brightly coloured ceramic tiles can be found in the Baba-Nyonya shophouses on walls and floors. Coloured floor tiles made of terra-cotta are commonly seen in the verandah walkway and inside of shophouses. Most of the tiles were imported from Britain. English rose is a popular motif that can be found commonly in Babanyonya shophouses. Coloured ceramic tiles are not only popular in the Baba-Nyonya shophouses of the eclectic style but they are also used by the Malays to decorate their main stairs (Lim, 1987). A typical Baba-Nyonya shop house usually has *tiah datuk* (first hall), *tiah gelap* (second hall), one or two courtyards or *chim chae* (air wells), ancestral hall, bedrooms, bridal chamber and kitchen.